Mrs. Cross

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Calgary Herald, Dec. 8/34

CENTRAL PIONEERS CHOOSE PERMANENT REUNION GROUND
AT THE OLD RED DEER CROSSING.

Many towns in Alberta boast some historic spot, intimately connected with old time history. With the passing of the early pioneers we are losing many of the old traditions which cast a glamor over the early days in the west.

The "Old Red Deer Crossing" is one of Alberta's historic spots, and the Old Timers' Association of Central Alberta has procured a six acre plot there, and in the early spring a cabin will be erected on the spot where Mr. R.L. Goetz operated a store in 1884. The place will be used as a permanent reunion ground for the Central Alberta Old Timers.

At this site nature provided a natural elevation of the river bottom, which made fording possible at all seasons of the year. The faint traces of an old Indian trail used even before the advent of the Traders, can still be seen at the Crossing.

This is one of the oldest trails in Alberta and was used by the Indians when they went north or south to fight or visit with other Indians. It ran from Dog Pound (Morley) to Lone Pine (Olds) thence to Waskasoo Tepee (Red Deer River), and thence north. When trading posts were established at Rocky Mountain House, Fort Edmonton and Battleford, all the Red River carts passed by way of the Crossing, coming overland from Winnipeg on the east or Fort Benton

(Montana) on the south.

As early as 1834, a log shack was built at the Crossing, close to the river bank, by a trader named MacPherson. This was used for his own convenience on his way north and south bartering for furs; but in time it served a great variety of purposes. When settlers began to arrive in the country it was used as a stopping house. The fall and winter of 1884-85 it was used to house a homesteader's family named Stewart (now of Penhold). The following summer it was used as a gambling den by a number of professional gamblers who camped down the river during the day and would return at dusk to gamble all night with the freighters or traders passing through. The following year or two it served as a Presbyterian manse for a young missionary, and in 1890 it was converted into a blacksmith shop by William Springbett (now of Red Deer).

In 1883, Mr. G.C. King, who owned a store in Calgary, built a log trading post at the Crossing and in 1884, Rev. Dr. Gaetz who had homesteaded where Red Deer now stands, bought out the store and put his son, Ray, then a very young man, in charge of the post.

The next spring, 1885, saw the Rebellion, and the Crossing, as the fording place for all traffic going north and south, was a strategic point. A cannon, being taken north across the river on an improvised raft, overbalanced and slid into the water, but was later retrived. The 65th Battalion, which had been recruited in Montreal and brought by rail to Calgary, camped at the Crossing overnight, on its long march from Calgary to Fort Edmonton to try to quell the rebellion.

Following the rebellion in the summer of 1885, the government established a ferry, at the crossing, and Mr. Sage Bannerman who was put in charge brought his family from the east to make their home there. A police barracks was also built at the Crossing that summer, and stopping houses were built to accomodate the settlers who were coming in. In fact the Crossing became the "metropolis" of Central Alberta. In 1886 a school was established nearby, with seven pupils, five from the Gaetz family and two McLellan children.

In 1889, the Methodist church of Canada, realizing the needs of the Indian children established an Indian Industrial school on the high banks of the river on the west side of the Crossing. The school house was built very substantially of stone cut from the river nearby, and other buildings were erected from time to time. For about twenty-seven years, under the direction of the missionary department of the church, the Indians were instructed in religion, in the rudiments of education, and in domestic and farm work. In May, 1923, the first band of Hebridean settlers to arrive in the country was housed at the school, where they made their home for a number of months.

Today the old Indian Industrial School at the Crossing stands lonely and neglected. No beacon light shines from its high promitory to cheer the lonely settler; no bell peals forth its chimes in the morning calling the unwilling boys and girls to their tasks; no evening bell announces the fact that the day is done and the time for evening prayers has arrived. The school stands, a silent sentinel--

a relic of bygone days.

In the year 1891, the railway came north from Calgary to the Red Deer River, and instead of coming through the Crossing as the settlers expected, it sought the easier grade and crossed three miles down the river at the present site of Red Deer. Almost over night the settlers moved to the new site, and the Crossing became the "Old Red Deer Crossing" to old timers, a spot of cherished memories.